

"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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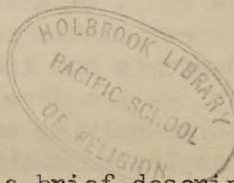
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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTHEAST

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The purpose of this paper is to present a brief description of the community development movement in eight southeastern states, to make some comments on its significance, and to raise some questions concerning the role of the Church in such a program. The eight states from which information was obtained are Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia.

THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY

In this age of impersonal relationship and mass organization many are unaware of the values and the possibilities of community life. One lives and works with a large number of persons whom he knows only casually, if at all. Impersonal contacts characterize much of city life and are becoming more and more common in town and country areas.

One aspect of this type of living is its segmented character. Each interest of life tends to be carried on with a different group of people many of whom are strangers. By contrast, in the small community people are more inclined to react to each other as whole persons. In a business relationship a merchant, for example, would see not only a customer and a certain amount of profit but also a parent, a neighbor, and a fellow member in the church and civic association. The church is no exception when it comes to fostering a segmented type of living -- of seeing a phase rather than the whole life. It has emphasized doctrine at the expense of a community ministry. It has frequently focused on preaching and overlooked a broader program. The pulpiteer has been favored over the pastor and community leader, and attention has been on creed rather than deed.

The need for community is also expressed in economic terms. Leaders in the small communities see their population and wealth moving to the city and find their institutions and services inferior to those in urban areas. Improve-

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ment of economic conditions is a mainspring of community development in the South. Leaders have recognized, however, that "man does not live by bread alone" and thus a many-sided approach has been developed.

MEANING OF COMMUNITY

Only a cursory review of religious literature dealing with social action is needed to reveal that two somewhat different emphases and connotations are given the community concept. The one stresses sharing of a tradition and the other the locality group. The former emphasis is more likely to be given by the theologian, the latter by the sociologist.

The term community development has been used to indicate any general improvement in the place in which one lives. Consequently, all civic-minded groups and individuals would be making such a contribution. The term is used here, however, in a more restricted sense. A community development program is one in which the several interests and institutions -- religious, educational, agricultural, industrial, etc. -- are developed together in a harmonious fashion. Emphasis is on overall problem-solving and coordination. The internal program of a given church, for example, no matter how effective and expanding would not be considered to be work in community development. The term is reserved for the programs concerned with a large segment or the total life of an area.

Although the isolated community of yesterday has all but disappeared, the South probably has stronger local groups than other sections of the country. This is associated with greater rurality, greater dispersion of urban population, low in-migration, and emphasis on face-to-face relationships.

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE MOVEMENT

Three periods in the growth of community development may be noted. Following World War I intensive interest was shown in the community movement as expressed in social welfare organizations, city planning, Chamber of Commerce programs, and rural development. In the late twenties the Agricultural Extension Service was active in organizing open-country community clubs in a number of states including those in the South. A few of the clubs organized in that period are still in existence. A second period of intensive interest in community development was just preceding and during World War II. In rural areas the land-use planning interest was followed by neighborhood organization. In towns and cities extensive organization was perfected to conduct various programs related to the war effort. A third period in the community development movement is the present. It extends over the last six or eight years. A dominant feature of the movement in the South has been its business sponsorship.

In terms of emphases and organizational features, programs may be classified into three types. The most extensive one, found in both rural and urban areas, is characterized by business sponsorship and contest features. A second type of program emphasizes a survey and study group approach. A third type might be termed individual grass-roots programs. These have no organization stimulation from the outside and depend entirely on local leadership. For the most part this last type is found in small communities and is led by school, church, or farm groups. Outstanding examples of small church-centered communities in the South are Big Lick, Tennessee, and Morris Fork, Kentucky. National mission boards, however, played a part in organizing these programs.

The study group approach is emphasized in the program conducted by the

Extension Division of the University of Virginia. Related to this is the self-analysis approach employed by the Bureau of Community Service at the University of Kentucky. A related research and study approach was used in the Greenville, South Carolina, project some fifteen years ago. Because of the experience and research emphasis several publications on this program have appeared.

The open-country programs are usually sponsored by business and agricultural groups through community development associations, Chambers of Commerce, or some other arrangement. The sponsor provides prize money and occasionally pays the salary of a community organizer, while the agricultural Extension Service contributes educational leadership.

A second feature of the above type program is the annual contest in which local organizations compete for cash prizes. The contest has a long tradition in the merchandising and agricultural worlds. In agriculture, contests are extensively employed in production, homemaking, youth work (4-H). The innovation in the community movement is that the competition is among groups rather than individuals.

A third feature in the program is its extensiveness and the scope of interest involved. For example, the Rural Community Development Contest in the Tupelo, Mississippi, area emphasizes three aspects: (1) farming practices, (2) homemaking practices, and (3) community activities. The latter includes programs in the fields of religion, youth and club work, recreation, health, education, government, community beautification, and welfare. The Georgia Home Town Plan, one of the urban programs, points up the following areas of interest: beautification, municipal development, tourists, recreation, education, health and sanitation, business and industry, agriculture, advertising and publicity, transportation, religious welfare, youth.

A fourth feature of the program is the type of organization operating in the local community. In the small communities this organization is a club in which all families in the area may participate. In the large communities the organization takes the form of a council. Open-country clubs are found in all of the eight states except Kentucky. Over 2,000 of these clubs are now active in these seven states with Tennessee having nearly one-half of the total. In this state the rural program grew rapidly. The state is divided into five districts with the Chamber of Commerce of a large city in each district sponsoring the county programs. District sponsorship is carried out in four other states. In South Carolina only one county has been organized. Mississippi is characterized by autonomous county sponsoring agencies. These are found in twenty-three of the eighty-two counties.

In addition to the overall community development programs, several individual organizations have their own community emphasis programs which are organized on a contest basis. One foundation finances the contest program for the National Grange and for Emory University in its church development work. In 1953 nearly 150 local granges in four of the eight states were enrolled in the community development work. In this same year over 1,300 churches enrolled, and over 500 filed reports in the church development program.



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SOME STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

A movement of this scope and significance demands frequent evaluation. Where is the movement leading? Is it building community?

Participants in the community programs described above have pointed out several benefits: (1) Town and country relationships have improved and barriers between the two groups have broken down. (2) Community morale and spirit has improved and friction and conflict have lessened. Mutual aid in open-country neighborhoods has increased. (3) Improved services and facilities have resulted, such as, the establishment of school bus services, the renovation of a church building or the hard surfacing of a road. (4) Decided financial benefits in terms of increased agricultural production, greater retail trade, etc., have accrued. (5) Interest in civic and community organizations has increased.

Limitations of contest-centered commercially-sponsored programs should also be noted. Some regard these programs as largely promotional and short-lived. The contest is the major objective and when it is over there is nothing else to be done. There is a great need for the establishment of long-time goals and procedures. Lack of professional leadership to provide consultation and sound educational procedures for community organization is regarded as another limitation. Community-wide organizations tend to be short-lived. One reason is that there is no individual or group responsible for their long-time support.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The relative strength of the church in the organized life of the southern community should be noted. Three-fourths of all memberships in organizations are in churches. About four adults in five claim church memberships. The church and the minister have relatively high prestige. The question arises as to whether the church is making use of this position in a program of community service.

Cursory examination of the many development programs indicates that most emphasis has been placed on physical development -- buildings, equipment, beautification -- and on internal programs. Much less often has the focus been on programs for relating a church to its community. Here is where emphasis must be placed if the church is to play an influential role in community development.

Types of contacts which churches have with their communities may be noted. A frequent type of contact is allowing the church plant and other facilities to be used for various community projects. A second type of contact which the church may have is that of direct sponsorship of groups or projects, e.g., Scouts, adult club, and welfare project. A third type of contact is to carry on direct sponsorship not alone but in cooperation with other agencies. A fourth type of contact between church and community, although informal in nature, may be the most effective. This is done by the church developing people of like mind who go into the community and organize themselves in various ways to raise the level of life.

To summarize, the position may be taken that Christian social education is the central function of the church in serving the community. This involves teaching Christians ideals or values, evaluating existing institutions and programs in light of these goals, and suggesting the general direction in which Christians should work in community reconstruction. When a church carries on this program vigorously, it becomes, as it should ever be, the conscience of the community.